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Comment in response to the DOE's Federal Register notice 66 FR 43850 about possible approval of the Yucca Mountain site as a high-level radioactive waste repository:

The process by which approval of the Yucca Mountain site has gotten this far is seriously flawed. The elimination of the other sites in 1987 had little to do with science, public health, or the environment. Rather, it was a political decision. In 1992 it was discovered that Yucca Mountain wouldn't meet the EPA standards of the time, because of the radioactive gasses that would be released through the cracks in the rock. So Congress exempted Yucca Mountain from this standard. These same cracks would allow water to pass through the site more rapidly than EPA regulations allowed, washing the high-level radioactive waste into the ground water. So a few months ago, the EPA standards were changed to exempt Yucca Mountain. Decisions like these show that the purpose of the process is to approve the site in spite of the fact that large amounts of radioactivity would be released into the environment. In short, the site should not be approved because it is an earthquake zone, and large amounts of radioactivity would be released in a relatively short time.

We do need to do something with the waste, most of which is stored at the reactors (mostly nuclear power plants) which produce it. Clearly, the DOE is not capable of making an accurate scientific assessment of what to do with it. Some independent nongovernmental body, shielded from political influence, should be called upon or created to start over studying how to dispose of the waste.

In the mean time, the utilities which own the nuclear power plants which produce the waste should be required to pay for improvements in their on-site temporary storage facilities, to reduce the number and severity of radioactive releases while the study is carried on. These utilities should also be required to cover the \$6.7 billion cost of the DOE's 20-year 'study'. None of these costs should be passed on to ratepayers or taxpayers.

The result would be a rapid phase-out of the remaining US nuclear power plants, which should obviously be our highest priority. After all, we are going to need a lot more than one repository if we continue on the current path.

Sincerely,

William Mills  
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